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SUBJECT: DPKO WARNS OF RISING TENSIONS ALONG
ETHIOPIA/ERITREA BORDER

REF: A. USUN NEW YORK 00359

1B. SECSTATE 72880

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. At May 29 United Nations Security Council (UNSC) consultations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations Assistant-Secretary-General Annabi described rising tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea and dangerous restrictions on the movement of the UN Mission there (UNMEE). Annabi warned that a minor incident could trigger military engagement in the area, and he advised Members to appeal to the parties to respect the cease-fire and to seek normalization of their bilateral relations. Most Members urged appointment of a Special Representative (SRSG) to address the ongoing crisis, and after the meeting, the Norwegian delegation proposed sending a letter on behalf of the Group of Friends of UNMEE to the SYG urging the same. Annabi recommended that Members invite the Permanent Representatives (PRs) from both Ethiopia and Eritrea to meet with the UNSC. Annabi did not see a plus-up of UNMEE as feasible in the near future, given the UNSC's recent history of downsizing as a way of expressing displeasure with the parties. Annabi did not make any predictions about what might happen when the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) leaves the scene in November. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Since DPKO's last briefing on May 8 (ref A), Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Assistant-Secretary-General (A/SYG) Annabi reported there had been further security incidents, namely expanding Eritrean control over greater areas of the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and reinforcement of Eritrean military positions, including reconnaissance missions near the Humera bridge in Sector West and other TSZ locations. Annabi also noted that the Eritrean Minister of Defense had visited Adi Quala in the TSZ on May 18. Annabi was concerned that the 7000 recently

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relocated (and potentially armed) IDPs in Om Hajer in Sector West could be used if military activity broke out. Annabi also noted Eritrean active troop rotations in Sector Center and Sub-Sector East and deployment of a total of 1900 Eritrean military personnel in Sector Center as additional causes for concern. According to Annabi, Ethiopia was reinforcing military positions near the southern boundary of the TSZ, despite its arguments to the contrary, with some 45 tanks moved toward Humera in Sector West. Annabi reported that Eritrean restrictions on UNMEE's freedom of movement remained in place, with new limits imposed in Sector Center near Mendefera, where a UN patrol was detained at gunpoint by

Eritrean police on May 18. Annabi also told the Council of warning shots fired by Eritrean Defense Forces and militias when stopped at UNMEE checkpoints in the TSZ.

13. (SBU) Despite UNMEE's reduced monitoring capacity, Annabi asserted that its presence still served as a deterrent to resumed hostilities between the sides. A further reduced configuration, he argued, would jeopardize a "meaningful observation mission" (NOTE: The question of UNMEE right-sizing will present itself to the UNSC when UNMEE's mandate is reviewed in July. END NOTE). Annabi worried that military preparations by both sides, compounded by the uncertainty surrounding the EEBC's November deadline and hostile public statements by both Governments against each other, risked turning a minor incident into a military confrontation. Annabi highlighted May 28 remarks by Ethiopian President Girma Wolde Giorgis denouncing Eritrea for supporting terrorist elements bent on destabilizing Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Annabi also mentioned May 24 remarks by Eritrean President Isaias, in which he called the TSZ "meaningless" and warned that any negative consequences that might result from the current impasse would be due to "a foreign power."

14. (SBU) Annabi did not make any predictions about what might happen when the EEBC left the scene in November, saying only that demarcation by coordinates could have "unfortunate consequences" for one of the sides. Annabi stressed that UNMEE and the SYG were committed to overcoming the stalemate and that the SYG was considering appointment of a new SRSG as part of this process. Acknowledging Members' eagerness to move on such an appointment, Annabi warned that to designate a new SRSG too precipitously in the wake of Eritrea's effective dismissal of former SRSG candidates would send the message that the parties could dictate the terms of UN appointments based on their own political preferences (NOTE:

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After the meeting, the Norwegian delegation proposed sending a letter on behalf of the Group of Friends of UNMEE to the SYG urging the expeditious appointment of an SRSG. (NOTE). Annabi admitted there was no magic formula to solving the impasse but recommended that Members continue their efforts, both collective and individual, to move Ethiopia and Eritrea away from the standoff by appealing to them to respect the cease-fire, defuse the situation and help normalize their bilateral relations. Annabi also suggested that Members consider calling in PRs of both countries to underscore the Council's concerns.

15. (SBU) Most Members - including Italy, the UK, Indonesia, Qatar, Congo, Russia, Ghana, South Africa, Panama and China - strongly supported the expeditious appointment of an SRSG as a way to promote a political process between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Members agreed that adequate leverage with the parties had not yet been found to bring the sides to compromise, and UK PR Jones Parry singled out coordination with the USG as critical, given the role we had taken in the past to try to mend fences between the sides. Members worried about the destabilizing effects of the crisis on Somalia. Russian Deputy PR Dolgov suggested a UNSC stop during its Mission to Africa in June as a way to address this "explosive" situation, and the South African representative offered the upcoming African Union Summit in Accra as another forum to pressure the parties.

16. (SBU) Drawing from ref B points, Ambassador Sanders called for the reinvigoration of the Military Coordination Commission (MCC) as a confidence-building measure between the sides. Annabi responded that DPKO Under-SYG Guehenno had raised this issue with Ethiopian FM Seyoum during his New York visit, and that Seyoum had promised to take action so that MCC activity could resume. Annabi assured that the UN would maintain pressure to ensure this happened, KHALILZAD